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In the claims:

73. A television messaging gateway for handling messages, said gateway being adapted to operate in conjunction with a television distribution system having a central location connected to a video downstream network constructed to carry video signals and distribute said signals to a plurality of terminals connected thereto, wherein at least one of said terminals is constructed to selectively display said video signal on a television screen, and an upstream network capable of delivering user input signals from a remote location to said central location, said television messaging gateway adapted for operating in conjunction with a messaging server constructed to store and forward messages, said television messaging gateway comprising: a message control interface adapted to couple to said messaging server for controlling at least one message therein, said message having address information associated therewith, to associate said message with at least one user; a video output module for generating video signals corresponding to said message, said module is being adapted to couple to the downstream network for distributing said video signals to a plurality of addressable terminals;

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 2 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

an input device interface adapted to connect to said upstream network for receiving user input signals;
means for directing said message between said message control interface and said video output module.

5 74 . The television messaging gateway as claim 73 wherein said television messaging gateway further comprises storage means to store a plurality of messages and the addressing information associated therewith.

75. The television messaging gateway of claim 73 wherein said input device interface is further constructed to receive user input signals which are inputted
10 using a telephone keypad, a user voice, or a combination thereof.

76. The television-messaging gateway of claim 73 wherein said messaging server is a unified messaging server.

77. The television messaging gateway of claim 73 further comprising receiver means to receive user generated messages.

15 78. The television messaging gateway of claim 73, wherein said upstream network is selected from a group comprising a telephony network, a bi-directional television distribution network, a wireless network, a dedicated wire network or a combination thereof.

79. The television messaging gateway of claim 73 wherein said user input signals are

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 3 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

selected from a group consisting of telephony input, touch tone signals input, voice input, remote control device input, or a combination thereof.

80. The television messaging gateway of claim 73 wherein said upstream network is a bi-directional television distribution network and wherein said terminal is adapted to send user input signals to said television messaging gateway via said upstream network.

81. The television messaging gateway of claim 73 wherein said input device interface further comprises a speech recognition capability and wherein said user input signals comprise voice signals.

82. The television messaging gateway of claim 73, wherein said terminal is adapted to receive user voice input, and transmit said voice input to said input device interface.

83. The television messaging gateway of claim 73, further adapted to be coupled to an IP based network for receiving messages and user input therethrough.

84. The television messaging gateway of claim 73, wherein said user input is inputted via a remote control unit having a microphone coupled thereto, wherein said microphone is constructed to receive sound energy and transform it to an audio signal; and wherein said remote control unit is constructed to communicate a signal corresponding to said audio signal to said terminal.

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 4 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

85. The television messaging gateway of claim 73, wherein said television messaging gateway further comprises a local module and a centralized module, and wherein said local module or a portion thereof is located at the user premises.

86. The television messaging gateway as in claim 73 further constructed to receive
5 user input signals, and to use said signals to identify and select a terminal to direct messages to.

87. The television messaging gateway as in claim 73 further comprising means for notification of receipt of a message.

88. The television messaging gateway of claim 73 wherein said messages are of a type
10 selected from audio messages, video messages, fax messages, text messages, and multi-media messages.

89. The television messaging gateway of claim 73 wherein said downstream network is a cable television network, a satellite television network, a terrestrial video distribution network, a radio frequency video distribution network, a DSL network, a
15 cellular network, a hybrid network, direct cable connection, or a combination thereof.

90. The television messaging gateway of claim 73 wherein said video signals comprise digital video signals and wherein said downstream network is constructed to transmit digital video signals and addressing information to address selected signals to a
20 selected terminal.

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 5 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

91. The television messaging gateway of claim 73, further comprising a voice recorder to record user voice, and further constructed to embed at least a portion of said recorded voice within an outgoing message.

92. The television messaging gateway of claim 73 further adapted to generate signals
5 that will cause a progress bar to display on said television screen a progress bar indicating relative progress of an audio or video message being delivered to said terminal.

93. (Presently amended) A television messaging gateway for handling messages, said
gateway being adapted to operate in conjunction with a television distribution system
10 having a downstream network constructed to carry signals and distribute said signals to a plurality of terminals connected thereto, wherein at least one of said terminals is constructed to selectively display an image corresponding to said signal on a television screen, operating in conjunction with an upstream network constructed to deliver user input signals, and further operating in conjunction with a messaging
15 server, said television messaging gateway comprising:

an input device interface being adapted to couple to said upstream network for receiving input signals;

a message control interface responsive to said input signals, for controlling at least one message having address information associated therewith, to

20 associate said message with at least one user;

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 6 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

an output module, adapted to generating signals corresponding to said message, the module further being adapted to couple to said downstream network, and constructed to deliver said signal to a terminal corresponding to said address information, for display on a television set coupled thereto; wherein said message control interface is constructed to control said message responsive to user input signals entered via a telephone keypad, a user voice, or a combination thereof.

94. The television-messaging gateway of claim 93 wherein said messaging server is a unified messaging server.

95 . The television messaging gateway of claim 94, wherein said upstream network is selected from a group comprising a telephony network, a bi-directional television distribution network, a wireless network, a dedicated wire network or a combination thereof.

96. The television messaging gateway of claim 94, wherein said television messaging gateway further comprises a local module and a centralized module, and wherein said local module or a portion thereof is located at the user premises.

97. The television messaging gateway of claim 94 wherein said upstream network comprises a bi-directional television distribution network and wherein said terminal is adapted to send user input signals to said television messaging gateway via said upstream network.

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 7 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

98. The television messaging gateway of claim 94, further adapted to be coupled to an IP based network for receiving messages and user input therethrough.

99. The television messaging gateway of claim 93 wherein said input device interface further comprises a speech recognition capability and wherein said user input signals
5 comprise voice signals.

100. The television messaging gateway of claim 93, further comprising a voice recorder module to record user voice, and further constructed to embed at least a portion of said recorded voice within an outgoing message.

101. A method for handling messages, adapted for operating in a television distribution
10 system having a television messaging gateway in a central location having at least one video source connected to a downstream network constructed to carry at least video signals and distribute said video signals to a plurality of terminals connected thereto, wherein said at least one of said terminals is constructed to selectively receive and display said video signal through a television coupled thereto, a
15 messaging server constructed to forward messages, and an upstream network capable of delivering user input signals from a remote location to said central location, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving a plurality of messages directed to a user, in a television messaging gateway;

20 converting said messages to corresponding video signals; and,

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 8 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

transmitting said signals to a particular terminal associated with said user for
outputting said message on a television set coupled thereto.

102. The method of claim 101, further comprising the step of entering user outgoing
messages via said upstream network.

5 103. The method according to claims 101, further comprising the steps of recording a
user's voice and embedding said recording within an outgoing message.

104. The method of claim 103, wherein said step of embedding is carried out
automatically.

105. The method of claim 101, wherein said television messaging gateway is responsive
10 to user input entered via telephone.

106. The method of claim 101, wherein said television messaging gateway is
implemented in part at a central location and in part in the user premises.

107. (Currently amended) A method for handling messages comprising the steps of:

15 using a telephone, inputting commands to a television messaging gateway, to
select at least one message directed to a user, said television messaging
gateway being adapted to direct such messages to a plurality of users;
causing said television messaging gateway to output messages in response to
said commands, for outputting said message on a television set associated
with said user, wherein said television being coupled directly or indirectly to

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 9 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

said messaging gateway.

108. The method of claim 107 further comprising the steps of:

Recording a voice message;

Automatically packing said voice message into an e-mail message; and,

5 Sending said e-mail message.

109 The method of claim 108 further comprising the step of inputting said voice message via said telephone.

110. The method according to claim 107, wherein said messaging server is a unified messaging server.

10 111. A computer readable media containing software that when executed by a computer will cause said computer to substantially perform as the television messaging gateway of claim 73.

112. A computer readable media containing software that when executed by a computer will cause said computer to substantially perform the method steps performed by the
15 television messaging gateway of claim 107.

113. (Presently amended) A method for handling messages in a unified messaging system where messages are delivered via a digital television network, the method comprising:

selecting messages in said unified messaging system, said message having

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 10 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

address information associated therewith to associate the message with at

least one user;

receiving video signals corresponding to said messages via said television

network; and,

5 outputting said messages on a television coupled to said television

distribution network.

114. The method of claim 113 further comprising the steps of:

recording a voice message;

Automatically packing said voice message into an e-mail message; and,

10 sending said e-mail message.

115. The method of claim 114 further comprising the step of inputting said voice

message via said telephone.

116. The method of claim 113 wherein said messages are of a type selected from at

least two of members of the group consisting of e-mail messages, voice messages,

15 audio messages, video messages, fax messages, text messages, and multi-media

messages.

117. The method of claim 113 wherein said step of selecting is performed by entering

commands to select said messages, and wherein said commands are entered

utilizing a telephone keypad, a user voice, or a combination thereof.

20 118. The method of claim 114 wherein said step of recording is performed by a terminal

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 11 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

coupled to said television network, and wherein said voice message is entered using a microphone coupled to said terminal.

119. The method of claim 113, further comprising the step of outputting a progress bar to indicate relative position within a message, when the message is selected from a group consisting of a video message, an audio message or an audio visual message.

120. A method for handling messages, adapted to operate in a television messaging environment, the method comprising the steps of:

Recording a voice message;

10 Automatically packing said voice message into an e-mail message; and,
Sending said e-mail message.

121. The method of claim 120 further comprising the step of first receiving an incoming message, and wherein said voice message and e-mail message comprise an outgoing message in response to said incoming message.

15 122. The method of claim 120 wherein said step of recording or a portion thereof is performed using a telephone.

123. A method for handling messages in a unified messaging system where messages are delivered via a television network, the method comprising:

selecting messages addressed to a user in said unified messaging system;

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 12 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

receiving signals corresponding to said messages via said television network;

and,

outputting said messages on a television set coupled to said television
distribution network;

5 recording an outgoing message

digitizing said outgoing message; and,

automatically packaging said message in an outgoing e-mail message and
sending said outgoing message.

124. The method of claim 123 wherein said steps of recording, digitizing and packaging
10 are preformed by a server remote to the television set.

125. A method for handling messages, adapted to operate in conjunction with a
messaging server constructed to forward messages, and with a television distribution
system having a downstream network constructed to carry signals and selectively
distribute said signals to a plurality of terminals connected thereto, wherein said
15 terminal is constructed to selectively display an image corresponding to said signal
on a television screen, and an upstream network capable of delivering user input
signals, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving a plurality of messages directed to a particular user in a messaging
server,

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 13 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

from a television messaging gateway, transmitting a signal corresponding to
at least one of said messages to a terminal associated with a user via said
downstream network;
displaying said message on a television set coupled to said addressable
5 terminal; and,
recording a user voice, and embedding said voice within an outgoing
message.

126. The method of claim 125, further comprising the step of entering user outgoing
messages via said upstream network.

10 127. The method of claim 125, wherein said step of recording is carried out using a
telephone.

128. The method of claim 125 further comprising the step of notifying the user upon
receipt of a message.

129. A system for handling messages adapted to operate in conjunction with a television
15 distribution system having a downstream network constructed to carry signals and
selectively distribute said signals to a plurality of terminals connected thereto,
wherein at least one of said terminals is constructed to selectively display an image
corresponding to said signal on a television screen, operating in conjunction with an
upstream network constructed to deliver user input signals to a central location, the
20 system comprising:

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 14 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

a distributed television messaging gateway, having a message control interface for selecting at least one message from a unified messaging server, said message having address information associated therewith, to associate said message with at least one user;

5 wherein said message control interface is constructed to select said message responsive to user input signals entered via a telephone, and said system adapted to feed a signal corresponding to said message into said downstream network;

wherein said signal is directed to at least one of said terminals, for display on
10 a television set coupled thereto.

130. The system of claim 129 wherein said television messaging gateway is implemented in part at a central location and in part in the user premises.

131. The system of claim 129 further comprising a voice recorder to record user voice, and wherein said system is further constructed to embed at least a portion of
15 said recorded voice within an outgoing message.

132. A computer readable media containing software that when executed by a computer will cause said computer to substantially perform the method steps performed by the television messaging gateway of claim 125.

DRAFT for discussion only,
please do not enter into record

Page 15 of 24

DRAFT for discussion only, please do not enter into record

133. A computer readable media containing software that when executed by a computer will cause said computer to substantially perform the method steps performed by the television messaging gateway of claim 123.

5 134. A computer readable media containing software that when executed by a computer will cause said computer to substantially perform the method steps performed by the television messaging gateway of claim 120.

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DRAFT for discussion only,
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Page 16 of 24

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